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Senior Dance Thesis

Gina Johnson

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SENIOR DANCE ThESIS



Gina N. Johnson



LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

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RESEARCH

AND

ARTICLES



WHAT IS DANCE?

"The dance—unique in its fragility—has remained immune to the staying powers of pen and camera. Always destroying what it has just created, dance is the most elusive art: it will not be caught, it will not hold still so we can survey it at leisure. As George Balanchine once noted, dance dares to go where there are no names for anything—it defies verbal analysis. But if this defiance is often frustrating, it is also one of dance's main attractions."¹ It is in the light of this reality that I will attempt to bring forth an answer to the question: What is Dance?

Dance is the rhythmic movement of the body. Gestures are used to express with the body. Hula for example is an elaborate series of gestures that mimic nature and the happenings within their environment. Even some ballets, like Jerome Robbins' 'Fancy Free' use everyday gestures (which are exaggerated for the stage) to tell a story. Some gestures are 'abstract', meaning that they are not the literal translation of feeling. For example, an unrequited lover who runs to the front of the stage and pantomimes the gesture of tearing their heart out and throwing it to the ground does not mean that they've had their heart surgically removed.

'Literal gestures' are however very prevalent in dance today, such as a man walking across the stage and shaking the hand of another man in very pedestrian form of greeting. Jazz dance often has very literal sexual gestures which appeal to young teenage audiences. All dance or movement uses Space, Time, Motion and Energy to express meaning. This meaning can be purposefully emotional, physical, kinesthetic, sacred,

¹ Cobbett Steinberg ed., The Dance Anthology (New York: Plume, 1980) xi.

profane (belonging to the non-sacred world), religious, social entertaining or purely artistic. Dance is usually, but not always accompanied by some kind of music.

Dance stirs up feelings. Dance expresses feelings. Dance heightens our awareness of the body-mind integration by doing it or viewing it. Dancing stimulates the act of being alive because we use our senses, our thoughts, and our feelings with an immediate relationship inside of our bodies. This is a very powerful and sometimes scary juxtaposition which exists, making dancing forbidden in certain cultures and embraced as a method of therapy and healing in others.

Dance can be fitness and exercise (participant) oriented. Aboriginal cultures would use forms of ritual dance to prepare for battle. Greeks had a similar tradition to prepare men for war. Drill teams and dance teams have taken dance to a level of competition, and aerobic dance has become a popular way to stay in shape through movement without having to perform.

Dance is distinguished from athletics (soccer, handball, track or swimming etc.), because it's primary function is to entertain, or to celebrate a sacred or social event. Dancing may not be a sport, but every dancer is an athlete. Dance is also distinguished from everyday movements (running, hugging, checking your mail) because its INTENTION is expressive beyond the mere boundary of everyday life. This means that dancing is more than just the body, but must also involve the mind.

In fact, dance can be a tool to directly access and exercise the mind. "Movement can activate and integrate the activities of the entire brain. It has the potential to rekindle the neglected centers of empathy and consequence. It can get in beneath the level of language where we are all more similar. It can preserve the language of the heart and

soul.”² We use our mind to think, to create intention and make meaning, which involves neurons, synapses and chemistry. Dancing helps to integrate between the left (logical) and right (creative) brain. The mind is more than just brain tissue. The more stimulation from all the senses (dancing for example), the more we encounter information and the richer and more meaningful the thought. Dance can be experienced alone and in groups; as a participant and or an audience member.

Dance is of the earth, but it aspires to take us beyond. Classical romantic ballet for example created the idealized image of the woman as a sylph. She is always portrayed as an otherworldly, unattainable mystery. Dancing on our toes is just one more example of the earthly body trying to defy gravity and be above the other ‘regular’ human beings. Nowadays, dance has become far more grounded, a way to connect the self to others and to nature with greater sensitivity, amplitude and joy. To varying degrees when we are dealing with dancing we deal with effortlessness *and* the exertion of effort—giving into gravity, resisting gravity and using gravity to add power to a gesture. Trained dancers do the more than the possible, they go beyond the mundane and the daily.

That being said, I think that every human is a dancer regardless of training, experience or even conscious effort. The operational definition of being human states: *as humans we are able to imagine, create and communicate with the use of our language and bodies. We are adaptable, we build relationships (with nature, spirit and each other) and we create culture in the way that we shape our environment. We must connect to our inner rhythm as well as the rhythm of the earth and that of the people around us in order to survive.*

² ‘To Dance is Human’ lecture notes/class material, Fall 2001, instructor Judy Scalin.

In order to be 'awake' human beings, we need *e-motions*. In the proprioceptive and kinetic sense, our bodies and joints can only move in certain ways, so we use emotion to change the meaning of a gesture. We dance to heighten this awareness of our body-mind integration, and or our inner rhythm. All things in life must be in rhythm. In our bodies: heartbeat, breath, the blood coursing through our veins, blinking etc. Without rhythm, we get sick and die. "If rhythm is a part of life, movement is an expression of that natural rhythm. TO MOVE IS NATURAL. TO DANCE IS HUMAN."—Lady Walquer.

'Any human transaction is some form of performance,'³ we make things, imagine things and we have the capacity to know that there is more than what we see. Dance is an expression of the desire to express what we can't see. We are like a Moebius strip, continuous and interactive, constantly seeking out further knowledge of ourselves and the world around us. Your body dances whether you know it or not, for example, when you are mad, you pace back and forth across the floor. That is dance. Fear also makes your body dance, like when you hear scary music in a movie and you contort into awkward shapes like you're trying to hide from the TV screen and attach yourself to your boyfriend's arm.

As long as your heart is in your body and it is beating then you are always dancing. We are also the only species with a written language. When there are barriers in language with other cultures, we use movement to overcome them. We have the ability to change and grow; we are adaptive. Again, every human is a dancer.

Our body is our temple, the instrument of dance and communication. It is full of emotions and the more we use the body, the deeper our emotions, habits and scars go—

³ 'Dance History' lecture notes/class material, Fall 2001, instructor Dana Whitco.

positive and negative. It contains our brain, connects us to the earth and encases our spirit. All cultures have evolved out of and/or into some form of dancing. The Eastern Indians passed the tradition of living in a temple, when this act became impractical, into treating their bodies as the temples and the dance as the expression of their soul or spirit, "In India the temples served as museums which confined and gave dance its spiritual element"⁴. The separation between class social statuses was defined by early court dancing. In Africa dance is a natural phenomena. All people dance, at different times and different stages of their lives. Dance is a peace keeping device within their culture, it can bring disorder to order and make 'meaning' in fractured times. Dancing can say volumes, in most cases, with out saying a word.

Dance can also be an historical chronicle. For example, when the Hula was banned in Hawaii because it was 'un-Christian' (much the same as it was in the 12th century when the church banned dancing in Europe) the elders of the Islands used their dance to keep a record, or an illustration of their history. This is merely one example of how dancing reveals not only the beauty and physical energy of a culture and time, but it's pain, it's hopes, values aspirations and tensions. By watching the movement of a foreign culture, we have the potential to connect with that culture on a deeper level than merely learning about them in books.

The most basic form of dance is movement, which can be broken down into technical terms by those who study it as an art form. It is an emotional catalyst evoking the soul and provoking the mind. Dance is intellectual, social and spiritual. It is a universal language spoken by every human the instant their heart begins to beat. All

⁴Ramaa Bharadvaj, "To Dance is Human" lecture notes/class material, Fall 2001, instructor Judy Scalini.

cultures weave dance into their elaborate tapestries and therefore every human is a dancer. On that fact we can rely, so go out into your world 'face the music and dance'.

MUSICAL THEATRE AND CONCERT DANCE CHOREOGRAPHY

Although the exact date, location and time in history can never be accurately pinpointed, human beings began to dance long before there were spotlights, billboards and theatre critics. Religion, emotion, celebration and war have all been the impetus for man to dance, and one of the earliest forms of communication was movement. So when did these raw, tribal rituals move from the meadow to the Met? Most scholars attribute the development of theatre to the Greeks, and more specifically to the hedonistic celebration extravaganza that occurred in honor of the god Dionysus called the Dithyramb. In Rome theatre also began to grow professionally in 22 B.C.E. because of two talented artists named Pylades and Bathyllus who were both capable of performing solo versions of entire myths or tragedies.¹

In these productions there was no difference between *musical* theatre and regular theatre because music and dance were both equal and integral devices through which to tell your tale. "In the early stages of their development, the arts of music, dance and drama were so closely connected that the history of one is at the same time the history of the others. The basic of the three arts was most probably dance, for the instrument of

¹ Selma Jeanne Cohen, Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present (New York: Harper & Row) 1.

dance, the human body, did not have to wait to be invented; it was there from the very beginning."²

Much further on in history religion again became a reason to dance when the Christian Church realized that they could gain popularity by incorporating the formerly banned act of dancing into the mass rituals. The royal court dancing which later developed gave way to a theatrical profession because of the complexity and sophistication of drama in the French and Italian Renaissance period. At the request of the famed dance enthusiast (and dancer himself) Louis XVI in 1669, a composer named Jean Baptiste Lully created the French Academie Royale de Musique et de Dance, now the Paris Opéra. Other major institutions followed and theatre dance officially left the royal ballroom and entered onto the stage. From this very truncated version of how dancing moved up among the other arts to stand alone we can see that in most situations it is this inherent combination of music, drama, story and dance that makes for the strongest performance, and more directly accounts for the huge popularity of what we now call Musical Theatre.

This particular style of dance is inherently an American tradition. Coast to coast, community summer stock to Broadway hits, classic television and movie musicals and the current resurgence in popularity in film, musicals are pleasing to theatre goers and businessmen alike. The key element to all of this is of course entertainment, which I believe is the central function of musical theatre; Bob Fosse was the master of the "razzle-dazzle" concept and drew huge inspiration from early entertainment in burlesque halls. Whereas concert dance can range from a political statement to a study in pure

² Anatole Chujoy and P.W. Manchester, The Dance Encyclopedia (New York: Simon and Schuster) 649-650.

movement, musical choreographers are working with pre-established perimeters and a story which they must propel through their work.

Now, this is not to say that the musical theatre choreographer is working with their hands tied because of predetermined themes and lyrics. Quite to the contrary, creativity is an essential tool when put in this position. "While the director has the given script to work from, and the musical director teaches music and songs already written, the choreographer must undergo a specific process to first *create* his material, structuring his dances to suit the dramatic context, and finalizing the steps to be used even before they can be taught to performers."³ A musical theatre choreographer's first job is to sit with the director and ask several questions with regard to how the dancing can help to maximize the success of the overall show and contribute to the entertainment of the audience.

In concert dance almost always the choreographer is working from a far more personal place of questioning within themselves to find inspiration or motivation to create a work. This can be an intimidating abyss if you're not moved to express something before the process begins. Improvisation, experimentation and a process of development is therefore at work as the choreographer and the piece develop simultaneously. When the primary goal is the completion of the dance, evolved to its highest potential within the choreographer's intention there is room to grow, and therefore 'rehearsals' are not merely repeating the number to assure stamina and accuracy, but really they are a time to create the work itself. Within this time the choreographer can manipulate the steps to best enhance the skills and personalities of the dancers involved.

³ Robert Berkson, Musical Theatre Choreography (London: A&C Black) 1.

Musicals are slightly more complicated in their entirety. They are a cacophony of characters, lines, a score, music, props, timing, and sets and of course dance. This means that the choreography must be set in stone as soon as possible so that the process of 'rehearsal' (or repetition with all elements combined) can begin. The skill level of the cast is also an important factor when creating either form of dance. The musical theatre choreographer is often put in a position to make actors with little or no formal dance training able to translate their work and look good doing it.

Now although this may create the impression that these two forms of dance are like night and day, they actually have many things in common. A key part of both kinds of choreography is the importance of visual imagery projected through the steps. It is most common that concert choreography attempts to work with broad abstract imagery, either working within the traditional steps of ballet, modern, jazz or tap dance or creating completely original movement. Musical theatre also takes its roots from these traditional forms of dance, Agnes DeMille was the first to bring ballet technique to musicals like 'Oklahoma!' and 'The Sound of Music', and it also incorporates direct, literal gestures as a staple of the steps from which to draw. The origins of musical theatre gestures are far more risqué than the black and pink of ballet however. Old time Vaudevillian shows, mimes, strippers, and courtesans alike all helped to shape the theme of much of the popular musicals today such as 'Chicago' or 'Fosse'. Use of gesture is also very common in concert dance although it is not so much a requirement as an artistic choice.

It has been my experience that the most important difference between musical theatre and concert choreography is the stage space on which to work. Although there are now some elements of props and set *pieces*, there usually is no *set* on a concert stage.

Musicals are known for the intricate, flashy, detailed, multi-leveled, awesome sets on which the dancers must maneuver gracefully while singing and dancing at the same time. Where you find in concert choreography that the defining moments of a choreographer's talent are in the body of the phrase work, in musicals it's more often than not the flawless and creative transitions in, among, around and on the set that really stop the show. The set is paramount, even if it's not made of wood and metal, but rather if the dancers themselves temporarily create a tableau. A good example would be the girls in Paige Porter's 'Money' piece in the Evening of Concert Dance in 2003, who recreated a small scene from the musical 'Cabaret' using all of their bodies to make a wall and a window through which two starving children were begging. This was highly effective and brought sudden life to an otherwise empty, flat stage.

I began this essay with a very brief history of dance. I did this to demonstrate not only the universal origins of all movement, even though the current manifestations of concert and theatre choreography have diverged into complete entities on their own, but also to emphasize the importance of knowing the background of ones own passion and art.

"History shows the dancer his heritage, his place in a line of distinguished, artistic ancestors. It is a legacy to instill a sense of pride—and responsibility. For those of us who love to watch dance, a study of history broadens our perspective by enlarging our range of experience. Our personal knowledge of dancing is largely limited by the time and place in which we live, and we tend to attach value to what we know, to what is comfortable because it is easily understood. The vicarious experience obtained from knowledge of history shows us that different forms are not invalid simply because they

are unlike our own. Such knowledge increases our tolerance by expanding our capacities to perceive values in the unfamiliar. At the same time, history makes us discriminating: we learn to recognize forces of outworn convention and deterioration, to distinguish the fashionable novelty from the genuine innovation. History teaches us not only tolerance but a critical attitude.⁴

⁴ Selma Jeanne Cohen, Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present (New York: Harper & Row) 3.

STUDENT THEATRE

VS.

MAIN STAGE OR FACULTY PRODUCTIONS

The experience one gains from working in the theatre is unlike any other moment in life. It is a plethora of interpersonal relationships that involve communication, frustration, respect, emotion, devotion and love. You learn how to carry another person, while letting yourself be held. You learn inner truths about yourself as human and an actor when you're forced to work so intimately with others. It is in these relationships, between you and the director, you and the cast, you and the other person in the scene, you and the audience, the cast and the director, you and the script, or you and the prop that defines your character and so on, that the magic of theatre exists as an intangible force that can only be created when all the pieces, all the relationships, are clicking in rhythm. The sum of the parts is greater than the whole.

The debate at hand is the difference between student and main stage or faculty organized productions. Immediately there is going to be a difference in the relationships associated with one group or the other. First you have the director. The director of a faculty show will come nicely packaged with a bow that reads 'respect me, I have more experience than you' and the measly actor feels the familiar inferior twang of 'the need to please'. You feel honored that you were chosen to be part of their show and want to live

up to the challenge. This I agree with, one should feel honor and a humble sense of responsibility having been accepted into any show. The difference is that in the case of student theatre, it isn't 'their show', it's yours. The sense of responsibility becomes more realistic because every ounce of what comes out of 'your show' is what you put into it in time, work, study, talent, money, effort, blood, sweat and tears. As far as faculty theatre, the potential relationship is already colored by a sense of inferiority. The future of the show depends entirely on the actions of the director in determining whether or not this initial social structure will continue or grow into one of mutual respect. Or, in some cases the production becomes a mechanical display of training with no real heart and soul. I'm sorry to say that this simple aspect of a complicated production can make or break the success of the show, and more often than not it is the bridge that is never crossed.

In a student production, the director is a peer, usually a fellow actor and quite possibly a friend. The respect may be there in these other aspects of your relationship to this person, but the respect must be built from the ground up in the show setting. They come to the table knowing that in order to make their vision fly it will take a team effort and are willing to commit immediately to a deeply connected relationship with every one involved in the show. And as in main stage work, if a student director walks into the space with an air of domination and superiority that they haven't even earned yet, the show will fall apart just as quickly.

As I stated before, in student theatre, nothing would get done if you didn't do it yourself. Working on a completely student run production is the most educational experience an actor in school can have hands down. If you don't know how to run lights

for example, you'd better learn and fast. If it rains, someone in the cast will have to go out and buy a tarp while two other people scramble to move the concessions. You learn to create costumes out of your closet and sew the fresh tear thirty seconds before you go back onstage. Every inch of the theatre becomes a familiar friend and for the rest of your life you will have already established a relationship based on respect for those who are working behind the scenes to make you look good on stage.

In main stage productions there is huge percentage of effort put in by people who aren't a part of the show itself. The 'relationship' between a separate technical crew who comes in and builds your set while you're at home on the weekend is basically non-existent. In student theatre, the actors are the ones building, cutting, painting, hanging lights, passing out flyers and making the show come to life. A sense of achievement and community is built among the cast without having read one word of the script.

As cliché as this may sound, it is often a more pleasurable experience to work with a student director because they know what it's like to be a kid. Of course most faculty professors are in touch with the environment a college student is working in as well as the work load that is put upon them outside of the theatre, the same is not always true of professional guests. Many of these outside guests began their careers as artists right out of high school and have been living the fast paced, late night, long hours that accompany a professional setting. As much as I feel that we as artists in training should be exposed to this environment so as not to be shocked into a desk job when we graduate, I think these 'pros' really don't know what it is like to be a college kid balancing an overloaded academic schedule, four to six *other* rehearsals a week, a part or even full time job on top of their particular piece. Demanding professionalism, commitment and flexibility are

legitimate expectations of anyone trying to mount a production however large or small, but I often find that the same qualities are hard to find in directors or choreographers who'd rather not be working with lowly college students.

The lowly college student should be advised that there is plenty of time to build the calluses this business will undoubtedly generate and while maintaining the awareness of your position as a player with an understudy in the wings, you have every right in a student or a main stage theatre production to create an open dialogue with your director, your scene partner or anyone else who you don't feel is reciprocating your effort.

Along these lines of a 'professional' coming into a college setting without prior experience (I qualify this statement as such because often those who come in and learn to love the unique experience of working with adult students will return again with even more respect and deserved higher expectations; while those who learned off the bat that it wasn't their cup of tea are less than likely to try twice) I often find that the harsh truths about the big, bad world are set too quickly upon people that don't have the outward appearance of a Hollywood starlet. It is generally in student theatre that everyone who auditions at one time or another gets the opportunity granted to them that will make a difference in the human beings that they become. This is not to say that a faculty or professional show will only cast the beautiful people, but I think nine times out of ten it's in a student show that the wall flower with the phenomenal talent will learn to bloom.

It may sound in retrospect that I'm biased toward student productions because of my few miserable experiences I may have had with the main stage. Quite the opposite is true. In four years of college I had a majority of wonderful experiences in both venues, very few of which were completely student run. The key is that I remember every minute

detail of the shows I built from day one. I remember every person who looked after me and try my best to acknowledge those who look up to me. I respect those faculty members and professionals who learned to respect me because of what I could bring to their work, and I know what I'll expect of myself when I'm in a position to fill their shoes. Many monotonous days of rehearsal for a performance that is decent and clean is nothing compared to the nitty-gritty, low-down dirty work it takes to put out the performance of a lifetime.

ÆLA ÆCƆDIE

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ÆNALYSIS



PHILOSOPHY OF DANCE:

MY DANCE AESTHETIC

The idea that one's personal aesthetic can be defined in words and set in stone is ludicrous. Every minute of everyday the dancer's mind, body and soul is shifting, adjusting, adapting, changing and evolving, and their aesthetic morphs right along with them. There are however, fairly well established elements that are consistently reflected in their work or their taste for being involved with dance. Therefore, I will attempt to create here a working definition of this nature regarding my own personal, subjective and ever-changing dance aesthetic from the perspectives of my self as a choreographer, an audience member and as a performer.

It's almost easier for me to define my choreographic aesthetic in terms of what I *don't* like. I do not want my choreography to outwardly resemble the contemporary modern technique taught predominantly here at LMU, I do not want what I do to resemble contemporary, lyrical jazz this being my least favorite aesthetic not only to perform but also to observe, and I do not want my choreography to fit into the concert seamlessly with the other student pieces. I attempt to make my movement completely unique (the motivation of which comes out of my own body and abilities, not simply from following the formula traditional dance making). I *do* want my piece to be technically accurate (depending on the genre of dance), with a strong, tight connection to musicality. Like Balanchine, I want the audience to "see the music and hear the dance". That said, as opposed to standard concert dance work, I find that I'm most comfortable choreographing for musical theater, where the music and the dance are wed and it is a wonderful challenge to create movement which has been done hundreds of times before in a way that is unique, and suits the current space and the current cast.

I feel as a choreographer and a performer that it is important to consider the audience perspective and make something that is approachable and appealing to an untrained eye. This doesn't mean the movement should be simple, or the story should be

mundane, it would be foolish to expect everyone to pick up on the minute details of the performance, but it is paramount that my audience walks away with a feeling of satisfaction, or at least that they feel they were entertained. Thus, in this way my aesthetic as a choreographer blurs a bit with my aesthetic as an audience member. I choreograph something that I would like to watch. So, when I am an audience member I don't think that it is a matter of what specific dance form I am watching, what appeals to me is the commitment, execution, originality of the choreography and presence of the performers on stage at any given moment during the performance. I am equally turned on by vivacious, tight and stylized commercial jazz choreography as I am by graceful and ethereal classical ballet.

When I sit down to watch a dance on stage or screen I expect the movements to jump out and get under my skin. I want to experience kinetic mimicry and be 'moved to move with every move'. It is important that I feel a connection is being built between the performer and my self. The dancers should be exuding the choreography from every fiber of their being with a projection of power, control and ease in their technique. Whether or not the piece is story or movement based I want to be impressed. As I mentioned before, I want to be entertained, no matter the form of dance (even, in very rare cases, lyrical jazz).

Most often I feel least connected to a piece when there is too strong of a statement (racial, social, religious, personal etc.). There is a very fine line between art and politics and I like to see that line approached and even nudged a little, but never crossed. The result is inevitably pretentious and boring movement that is totally unattainable for the average audience member. Perhaps my turn off occurs because I feel that I'm being forced someone else's opinion when I've merely come to be entertained. I think that every choreographer has the right to make their statement in their work, but at this time in my life I don't feel the need to taint my love of movement with the heavy burden of social and political consciousness, I'd rather debate these issues with my mind than with my body. My audience aesthetic involves unique, vibrant, full dance that has style and approachability.

The definition of my performance aesthetic is slightly more complicated. There are those who feel that in order to like or appreciate an activity one must be successful or

talented when attempting to engage in it. There are others who might counter that argument saying that you can only truly appreciate something that has an ideal which you yourself cannot attain. I am a walking, or dancing as it were, juxtaposition of both sides of this conversation. I find that I have an affinity, for example, for both the athletic Stephanie Gilliland modern style of dance, the performance of which I excel in, as well as the physically foreign aesthetic of complicated tap dancing. While I am 'good' at the former and a 'novice' at the latter, my enjoyment of the performance of both is only slightly different. I think it's a case of frustration that occurs when attempting anything new, in this example tap, rather than a debate over the aesthetic superiority between two genres of dance.

I also have a great love for the performance of ballet, classical and contemporary. Probably because it is the genre in which I've had the most training, there is a sense of 'home' when I assume the air of a ballerina for a fleeting moment in class or on stage. There is a feeling of grand reverence for ballet in an audience member which seeps into my body as a performer, and gives me motivation to perform a style which is held in such high esteem. But, as has been the case previously, my heart throbs for the singing, dancing and acting combination of musical theatre. Performing via all of these different veins of art creates a high that cannot be matched by any single form alone.

Whether I wear the shoes of a choreographer, a performer or an audience member, I can be attracted to many aspects of dance. From Swing dance to Salsa, if the moves have flavor and the dancers sell the hell out of it, I'll like watching, doing and making it. My greatest love, however, lies in the performance, observation and choreographing of musical theatre dancing. This genre is the ultimate combination of the greatest aspects of every other dance form: the grace and technique of ballet, the expressiveness of modern dance, the class of tap and the flare of jazz. Nothing is taboo, and anything goes, in the theatre, you can have the cake, the frosting the candles and the crumbs all in one serving (not to mention that you get to eat it too). Musical theatre is the 'highly proficient hybrid' of the world of dance. It is the combination of each of these qualities that stimulates my senses, stirs my soul and defines my personal aesthetic.

Dance has been a part of my life since I started kicking in the womb to the rhythm of my dad's guitar, and I haven't stopped since. My mother is a dancer and my whole

family is involved in the arts, so it would be accurate to say that dancing is a part of my very fiber. At this point in my life I feel like I've taken my love and talent for something wonderful to the next level of pursuing it seriously as a career. Majoring in college in something that is not guaranteed to pay the bills is for me not as much of a risk as would be giving up dance completely for another career. Although I am currently facing an injury that could potentially stop me from pursuing highly athletic movement, I am simply going to shift my focus more fully on the genre that most accurately defines my dance aesthetic anyway, musical theatre.

I intend to pursue a career in commercial work on the stage and on the screen here in Los Angeles and in New York. Should my life take me in a different direction than that of a performer in the theatre and on the stage, dance will never be very far away. I have a strong interest in not only Kinesiology, but also the creation of herbal products that are geared toward the dancer with a health and earth conscious mind. Dancing is in my veins and I will never be completely without it in my heart.

PEER AESTHETIC EVALUATION:

AMY ALLEN

My observation of Amy's developing aesthetic and her own self observations seem to fit together nicely, showing me that she has not only matured in her creative process but also in her objective intelligence as a self critic. When we first began dancing together in our freshman year, Amy's personal aesthetic leaned heavily on her jazz background and musical theatre experience. I don't think that this particular aspect of her aesthetic has changed, but I do think that her experience in college and her experimentation with other genres and choreographic styles (modern or period dance for example) have rounded out her natural tendencies with a unique voice and maturity.

Amy has a knack for creating new movement rather than falling back onto traditional or common steps. This doesn't mean her work is unattainable for a traditionally minded audience, quite the contrary, I think Amy focuses on creating work that will appeal directly to an audience with a breath of fresh air blown into the work. Her use of humor, satire and life experience give her work a personal quality that is demonstrated in the themes she works with and the movements she creates. I think that music also plays an integral role for Amy when she's developing her work. She allows the music to give her theme life. Most importantly I think that Amy wants to entertain her audience with work that also entertains *her*.

I think Amy's aesthetic has grown over these four years into a collage of jazz, musical theatre and unique original movement. Her work has distinctive themes and is

geared toward entertainment rather than an artistic statement. She's used her education to develop further what she's been doing from the beginning, and now she approaches the same fun themes with intelligence and artistry.

ARTISTIC REFLECTION

The ability to watch the captured images of the show on video allows me to relive it not from a performer's perspective, nor from a choreographer's perspective, but from a third and in some ways the more important perspective of an objective audience member. Every piece jumps off the screen and touches me in a myriad of ways from tender, to invigorating, to humorous and fun. I see movements that I may have given the actors in rehearsal that never quite came alive until they were in front of an audience. I see the most unlikely of people digging in and performing their hearts out, not ashamed to look like a fool for their art (which only endears them to us more as audience members). I see an entire body of work that doesn't just consist of broken, individual 'numbers' that mean nothing to the story, but rather music and dance that glides smoothly like a snake winding in and around the plot.

The three street urchins (Ronnelle, Chiffon and Crystal) function much like a Greek Chorus in this story. They always know what's really going on behind the scenes and communicate this to the audience as the plot unfolds. The opening sequence therefore, is a traditional summary of the plot that tells you what to expect in the following play and is a downright warning of the 'horror' to come. We thought it was appropriate that the girl's first outfit not be that of street urchins, and not related in anyway to what the girls wear in the rest of the play. This serves to really separate them from what's going on around them and gives them some authority to speak about the

events which are unfolding. The blood red flapper costumes were very appropriate to the campy horror story that is *Little Shop of Horrors*.

There is a very precarious balance to maintain when choreographing unison movement between the need for simplicity to maintain togetherness, and the need for more complicated gestures which are impressive *because* they are performed in complete unison. Granted, having only three people (one of whom being yourself) makes the task a bit easier, but even still just one out of three who can't get the choreography can ruin the illusion of non-chalant, flawless sass that the girls must exude at all times.

This was quite a struggle for me, and a source of endless frustration within the circle of directors (director, assistant director, choreographer and the two musical directors), and a lesson in maintaining a level of maturity and building a good relationship with those whom you may want to hire you again in the future. There are several very talented people in the cast with whom I will never work again because of this very lack of maturity and focus. It is amazing the difference between teaching simple movements to non-dancers who are professional and committed and to those with dance experience who have absolutely no attention span or work ethic.

Jen (the director) and I decided that much of the choreography from the movie we liked, but it needed to be transposed to what would work on the stage verses the screen and many holes had to be filled in. The opening song "Little Shop of Horrors" was a good example of this process of transfer and creativity on my part. I observed first what I thought was the basic motif of the movement. Of course what I came away with is a fifties girl group feeling (a la The Shangri La's and The Supremes etc.). The feet are always moving to the off beat (two and four) whether they are locomoting through space

or shifting their weight under themselves. The arms and wrists are in a constant state of motion like the models on 'The Price Is Right', who undulate their upper extremities to show off the merchandise. The girls needed to move in much the same way except that their merchandise was the story that their gestures needed to tell.

I thought it was important to take advantage of all the possible entrances, exits and set pieces so that the girls were not only a literary thread throughout the script, but their physical presence needed to show up in every nook and cranny of the stage as well. So our first entrance was right down the middle of the theatre, instantly getting the audience physically involved with the show from the start. I think the overall theme of the movement that I was going for was a sense of smoothness. Our gestures were not necessarily slow, but it was my intention that they be seamless and fluid. I tried to maintain a dynamic quality between the small, quick, percussive hand gestures and the full arm sweeps which appeared more like pulling taffy through the air.

For example, to mimic the line "call a cop", we pulled our hands up from our sides in a smooth, continual motion wrists first during 'call a...' and popped our hands up to our faces framing them in a yelling position on 'cop'. I also worked to keep alternating upstage and downstage hands to give the choreography a sense of depth since we spent most of our time in a stationary line. This lack of locomotion was a conscious decision to keep the sphere of focus tight on just the three of us until the end when we used *our* energy and gesture to shift the attention to the shop on stage left.

The next major choreographic number (I hesitate to say dance because really it was a cacophony of gestures and crossings rather than traditional dance steps), was to the song "Downtown (Skid Row)", which involved the whole cast. The motivation for the

song to begin is an altercation between the girls and Mr. Mushnik and the song sets up for the audience the feelings of hopelessness, distress and depression felt by the inhabitants of 'Skid Row'. In every song that the girls sing there is generally a solo at some point in the music, and therefore I made the somewhat predictable, but in my opinion traditional decision to place that person at the center of our triangle shape. In this case it was Crystal who begins the song with her soulful verse and is flanked by Chiffon and I, as we mimic her gestures with our outside hands. Our movements are fuller, as the focus for Crystal should be on her voice at this point. The snap of our heads toward the bum on the floor is the command of energy that shifts the audience's attention unconsciously to where we want it to go.

As we begin the body of the song we circle Mushnik with a slow, mocking skipping step to accentuate our rebellious reaction to his attempt at authority over us. This step also pulls us far stage left so we can begin the crossing pattern that will bring on the rest of the cast. First we gesture to where we are going 'home to Skid Row' (stage right) and then we take slow even steps in that direction. As we move we are 'pulling' the first chorus member on with us from stage left. We sing 'where the cabs don't stop' and gesture to him as he runs on stage and tries in vain to hail a cab on the street (which is the audience, who has again been included as a part of our imaginary world). As the song continues a prostitute enters from stage right with a lonely man in hot pursuit. Not five seconds after she rounds on him and blows him off, the same man is approached by the lonely bum whom the man blows off in frustration. The prostitute wrangles the cabless man away from his task and the bum continues to pan handle the audience.

Up to this point in the movement I knew exactly what I wanted and had set movements, after that I let the situation move me to set steps. It's very difficult to imagine every element of a dance in your head, especially when singing, sets, space, audience etc. is involved, so I learned that with a large group number like this it's very helpful to have a solid starting phrase or pattern to work with, and then it's better to just wing the rest in person while you actually have the bodies there to work with.

Meanwhile Audrey has come out of the shop with a dust pan full of broken pots and dirt from Seymour's earlier mishap. After the chorus has crisscrossed the stage they frame her as she comes from behind the girls in the center. The cast gathers around Audrey downstage right in a tableau of the women longing to be her and the men longing to be with her. The focus shifts because of a light change and the immediate freeze of everyone except Seymour who appears in the shop with his broom and his own woes about poverty.

The focus stays with Seymour alone until he moves out of the shop and onto the street with the rest of the inhabitants of Skid Row who, as if in slow motion, move to spread out on the stage and begin a very slight rocking of the upper body...like the heartbeat of the city is emanating through the people. As the music builds the rocking becomes a deliberate pulse and the only people traveling are Seymour and Audrey who are slowly walking backwards towards each other to hit the final tableau of the song with the stars center stage against the backdrop of the City and her offspring.

The next piece was a fun and seemingly simple bit of choreography to emphasize Seymour's retelling of how he acquired the little Audrey Two. Once again the girls come on from the center stage entrance and cross behind Seymour whose stepped over the

invisible wall that denotes the shop into the 'dream world' of his story. We walk in rhythm with one hand snapping to the two and the four of the beat to get to our marks. A little hiccup step on our 'shoop-da-doo' break up the constant forward locomotion. When we stop our movements are a series of three isolations first in the hands, then the head and then the hips... which sends our hips into constant sway with the beat.

When it comes to the girl's choreography, each motion connects with the next and they all lead into one another. This continues the motif of their unison movement being in constant motion with a sense of flow. Every movement gets us closer and closer to our exit so it doesn't seem like we actually stop our dance, but it continues right off stage. The 'total eclipse of the sun' shuffle of our feet for example moves us further stage left, as we ripple our hands up one at a time and freeze with sharp head snap to the side— shading our eyes from the eclipse. Without missing a beat we jump right back into the 'hip sway and snap' when Seymour continues his story and scoot our way out backwards, fading out of the dream sequence just as we faded in.

When Seymour returns from his first radio broadcast, the following musical number is a recap of his sudden change in fortune called "You Never Know". Diverging a bit from having the soloist in the center, the number of people in the number is now even with Seymour joining the girls. The other major addition was the plant's first dance number as a hand puppet in Seymour's jacket. The personality of the 'Twoey' (short for Audrey Two as the plant is affectionately named) really shows in this number as he dances with precocious rhythm while Seymour stumbles around trying to mimic the conga line formed by the girls.

The next major number was the 'Dentist scene'. A.J. Knox did a wonderful job brining to life the singing, dancing, motorcycle riding, sadistic, Elvis impersonating dentist who makes his entrance with style. In order to bring to live the feeling of being suddenly in a dentist's office, I decided to go with a dramatic lighting and costume change just as the words 'I am your dentist' are sung aloud. A.J. removed his heavy leather jacket to reveal an old fashioned, white patent leather dentist smock, and the girls removed their cardigan sweaters and dew rags to reveal nurse outfits and hats, complete with red sequin accents. Another chorus member, Amy Allen, joined the 'nurses' just in time to be knocked out by the dentist and caught in a swoon by the girls. The rest of the scene was an elaborately choreographed series of tortures to various oral patients including one of the girls locking arms back to back with a terrified patient and bending forward, creating a make shift dentist chair where the dentist uses rusty pliers to remove a fake bloody tooth.

In the continuing attempt to have the girls come from 'nowhere and everywhere', during the black out immediately after the dentist scene we ran hid behind the counter in the store and changed in the dark. The risk of an awkward costume change was absolutely worth the laugh we received without fail every night when we slowly rise from behind the counter to back up Seymour as he's battling with the now huge plant over his conscience.

It was during this cramped changing time for the girls that the audience was treated to my absolute favorite dance number in the show: Seymour and Mushnik's tango. This was the first piece that I began to choreograph and it certainly shows as it was the most developed and technical. To prepare for the piece I worked with my mom a

bit, not only to familiarize myself with the basic steps which she already knew, but to have a partner to see if choreography that worked in my head would work in real life.

Immediately I began to work with the music on the C.D. which is from the original Broadway cast recording and worked out how the main story line would look visually depicted on stage. I ran into problems however, when we discovered that the lyrics on the C.D., the words in the script and the sheet music that we still had yet to receive were all very different. I knew that it would be impossible to teach two non-dancers and fairly complicated bit of choreography without music, and I couldn't dare wait for our elusive sheet music to arrive, so we decided to go ahead with the C.D. version and have the band learn that particular song by ear.

Jon Butcher and Tim Kodres were absolutely divine subjects to work with. I have never had the pleasure, and don't expect that I ever will again, to work with such dedicated and willing men who trusted me enough to throw very specific and technical dance moves at them learn them without question. I came into the first rehearsal with the intention of giving the exact choreography that I would give trained dancers and then work back wards from there to find a happy medium for their ability. I wasn't about to insult their potential by spoon feeding them simple baby steps that would have looked boring and lifeless on stage. To my surprise and delight they learned almost every single step I had in mind, and what didn't come out of my mind came out of their bodies and filled in the gaps to perfection.

The impetus for the dance is Mushnik's fear that Seymour might leave him and take all of his new found success away with him. So he decides that he must lure Seymour back with the proposition of becoming father and son and running a family

business. I therefore had Mushnik approach the lovesick Seymour with the first outlandish tango moves as he tried to sing and dance his way into Seymour's heart. Mushnik goes back and forth between telling the audience his situation and looking directly at Seymour in his seduction. Seymour of course is quite confused at first until he realizes that this could be his opportunity to be a part of a real family and immediately jumps at the idea facing Mushnik, clasping each other and facing the audience together to sing in chorus, "Mushnik and Son".

In accordance with his regained dominance over Seymour, Mushnik throws him about like a doll and Seymour innocently flits around the stage with the utter exuberance of a little school girl, this combined with the moments of partnered tango dips and across the floor patterns was hilarious. I focused very specifically on having the boys understand that when they were performing, the stunning visual of the tango would not be the movement, but the pauses. They became experts and running from one side of the stage to meet each other in a dead stop of total seriousness and concentration before busting into another moment of dance. This gave the illusion of complete precision movement, regardless of what they'd done just before, or what they were about to do.

The rest of the musical numbers in the show were either improvised movements that the actors came up with (which Jen and I of course refined), or more of the same choreographic themes from the rest of the show. The girls for example make two more entrances as back up singers in various locations on stage in "Suddenly Seymour" and "Suppertime". The costumes here are significant to the overall feeling of the plot. The romantic connection finally realized between Seymour and Audrey for example, has the girls in fuzzy pink and red sweaters, while the dark and sinister moments when they are

coaxing Mushnik to his death finds them in sleek black from head to toe. "Meek Shall Inherit" was less about choreography and more about creating the illusion that Seymour was being approached from all angles by people trying to get a piece of the plant. The girls meanwhile are reaping all the benefits by keeping one eye on him and tipping off the pursuers for a pretty little price. The end of the number culminates with girls having traded in their rags for dazzling sequin dresses, purchases thanks to their newly found hobby of playing 'where's Seymour', and Seymour signing his life away to keep the only love he's ever known.

The climactic ending of the show began with a very musically gospel themed recount of the events that had just transpired. The girls once again speak directly to the audience filling them in on the future that unfolded after the plant made short work of their simple 'little shop'. They proceed to warn the audience of the danger they are in, pleading with them, "Don't Feed the Plants!". When the music kicks in, all of Twoey's victims come back to warn the innocent about their fate. Jen and I struggled for a long time with how to approach this sudden shift in story. In shows past the plant has suddenly sprouted flowers that have the heads of those he has eaten etc. In the end what we decided on came out of a joke when the cast decided to hide behind the wall of the shop and pop up holding fake flowers to frame their faces as they sang. The visual image was such a surprise and so funny that we decided to keep it in the show. Seymour however couldn't get out of the plant fast enough after his death so he opens the mouth and comes from right inside Twoey's jaws to sing his lines.

I pulled the chorus members on from opposite sides of the stage as they were going to create more movement and build up as they crossed each other in the center and

made little triangles with Audrey and Seymour. Each little group had small little shoulder shrugs to give them a unison movement and the girls in the middle had slightly more intraket shoulder and hand gestures. The whole company learned four big sweeping arm gestures for the final crescendo of the song "Don't Feeed the Plaaaaants", while Audrey gathered the fake flowers from the other 'ghosts' into a makeshift wedding bouquet and walked to meet Seymour up on a crate above the whole cast forming the final tableau singing to each other "We'll have tomorrow." Everyone slowly turned to look at the huge, girating plant for the final note and the lights went black. For one final gag, strings of fake plants fell into the audience on the final moment as well.

I learned throughout this process about the incredible importance of working with people you respect and trust, specifically in this situation Jen Candy and Chris Sullivan. This production would not have happened with out our commitment to the work and to each other. I also learned the hard lesson that it is truly better to work with people you've worked with before. I say the 'hard' lesson because I now understand why I may not get cast in the future in a situation where the director has never worked with me before and would be taking an incredible risk to put his faith in my abilities. There are most definitely people from the cast with whom I will never professionally hire or work with again. I also gained from this experience the confidence that I can work on my toes to make a scene work, and I am able to create an entire show that is vibrant and cohesive without being repetitive and too predictable.

This risks that I took all stemmed from the original acceptance of the role as choreographer. This was my very first attempt at such an endeavor, having never attempted musical theatre choreography before. All other challenges and risks seemed to

me to go right along with this original dive, I simply told myself that I'd come this far and it would all work out in the end. My reputation as a potential choreographer was put to the test in front of not only my peers but also other choreographers whom I respect and look up to. I also risked working with actors who'd had no dance experience knowing that it would reflect on me if they didn't look great.

Next time I would certainly hope to know the people that I was working with a bit better, although I know it's a lot to ask. I'd also worry less about having exact step ready to be taught because of the inevitable let down when things change at a moments notice as is known to happen often in the theatre. I work well on the spot and under a reasonable amount of pressure and I would definitely keep the rehearsal time down to the few weeks in which we worked. It leaves less time for procrastination and disinterest to set in. This experience was for me the pinnacle of my college career in the arts allowing me to not only express my self as a visual artist, singer, actor, dancer and director but also as a choreographer.

PERFORMANCE REFLECTION

An important learning experience, as well as directorial and choreographic tool, I learned involved the short and extremely organized time frame within which we had to put together the show. A shorter rehearsal time, in comparison to dance concerts for example, created an environment of energy, focus and group moral because we only had five weeks to put together a complicated musical with all odds against us. The most specific challenge that would illustrate my point was the arrival of our sheet music two weeks before opening the show. Although this seems like an incredible set back, and to be honest at the time we all thought it was, but in retrospect it was actually a refreshing change from my experience with musicals in the past where so much time and energy is spent on the music that all the other aspects of the show lack detail. As I stated before, the necessity of complete focus and dedication forced the cast, crew and band to give their blood, sweat and tears to create the best work each of us was capable of performing in the shortest possible time.

Another new experience that 'Little Shop' offered me was the chance to play a character that is integral to the forwarding of the plot and one that in fact functions as the audience-player go between. It has been my past stigma to be in the, flashy, show stopping numbers and play a character that is either in the chorus or only on stage for their various key plot points. Being a 'Doo Wop' Girl allowed me not only the chance to interact with and sometimes manipulate the other actors on stage, but we could break the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience. For example, in Mushnik's death scene the girls are indirectly and yet quite obviously instigating the bloody demise of the greedy

shop owner. Throughout the play, in the prologue and the finally for example, the girls speak or sing directly to the audience giving them clues and foreshadowing events yet to come. We learned the function of a classic Greek chorus, narrating, interacting and working as a catalyst in the thick of the plot developments.

As a performing artist, I've been on stage in one capacity or another throughout my whole life. I had not, however, up until this point in my college career, been a soloist or a main singing character in a major production. In fact, until my audition, none of the other production team members or cast members (at the call back) had ever heard me sing musical theatre. Getting up the nerve to audition was risk enough in itself, but performing with confidence against my natural tendency toward self criticism and perfectionism was a huge leap for me, and I think a major turning point in my career. In an environment that was a precarious juxtaposition of security in familiarity and absolute terror under brutal peer scrutiny, I put my guts on the line and proved to myself that I really can do it.

Once I embraced my basic skills and started digging into my character I found and incredible challenge in the traditional casting of the girls as African Americans. It was hard for me to find a balance between being a street smart, jive talking 'home girl' and not crossing the line into racial stereotyping. It was difficult for me to say lines that were written in what could be considered Ebonics without being incredibly self conscious. The director asked me to put my hesitation aside and simple say the lines as they were written as naturally as possible, she asked my to go ahead and create a characature that could be refined as opposed to over analyzing and ending up with an awkward performance. This was a risk for me at first, but one which I think that I

overcame and ended up with a pleasant racially 'neutral' street urchin character who knows more than her outer demeanor reveals.

The next time that I am privileged to work on a musical production I would really like to simply perform as opposed to being heavily involved behind the scenes as well. I would also have worked privately with a voice coach to build a bit more variety in my performance as opposed to the first version of a song that came out of my mouth. Specifically during my solo at the end of the production, we'd learned the number so late in the rehearsal process that I feel as though I gave a very safe performance that could be considerably jazzed up. Overall I am more than pleased with the show, my work and my performance and I would be pleased to work with the director and assistant director at any time again in the future. And about that not being heavily involved thing.....not a chance, I know myself too well!

REVIEW
OF
UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION



CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

Little Shop of Horrors proved to me that I'm capable of achieving everything that I've worked so hard for all of my life in the arts, and most of all what I've worked for in college. Like anyone else pursuing a degree in a fickle field such as this, I didn't know what I was going to gain by walking away with a piece of paper that didn't guarantee me a job. I knew I wanted to feed my intellect as well as my body with knowledge of my art and of the world around me. Most of all I wanted an environment to create, to make mistakes, to be challenged and to challenge. I found all of these things here at LMU and especially in my performance experiences on campus, none so much as the incredible endeavor that was 'Little Shop of Horrors'.

From my very first semester here when I heard there was a student musical called 'Losing Casey' I was thrilled to be able to audition. So many of my friends at other schools were shuffled off with the other underclassmen to learn about the theory of what they were pursuing before being allowed to engage in the practice of it. I knew even then that musical theatre was the perfect culmination of all of my passions, and that this school would give me the opportunities I could only hope for on a bigger campus.

Unfortunately as the years began to roll on I realized that the emphasis on musical theatre was limited to the occasional review put on by the opera students and one other production of 'Into the Woods' which conflicted with the dance concerts. That particular phrase, "it conflicts with the dance concerts" came to be a plague on my former dreams of building a repertoire of cross-medium education in music, theatre, art and dance. I

therefore threw myself into the focus of dance whole heartedly performing in seven numbers each of my first two years.

In my later studies I became interested in choreography and still desperately wanted to balance my love of theatre with the demands of being a full time dancer, and so I removed myself from performance of both student dance concerts my junior and senior years. I did continue to choreograph for one theatre show, 'The Tempest' and also to choreograph a very theatrical number which was never performed in the student concert, all the while I never lost my desire to work more heavily in an entire musical production.

It was around this time that Jen Candy and I decided that we were not satisfied with the options given us to complete for our thesis in our respective degrees (theatre and dance) and we wanted to work on a musical. After much discussion and many hours of planning, the 'Little Shop of Horrors' project was born. All of my training and three years of experience on the other side of a choreographer's stick made me feel confident that this could be the project that completed my goals as a student of music, theatre, art and dance.

When I began this process, through thick and thin, good times and bad and even up to the performances, I was working harder than I'd ever worked on a show, and in every aspect imaginable. Over the course of five weeks I learned more about the inner workings of a theatre, a box office and a production staff than I'd ever experienced before. At that time it wasn't even my thesis, the gem that was the final product of all our toils was so impressive that I was granted the ability to turn it into my senior thesis retrospectively and it is my crowning achievement as a student of the arts.

I set my goals high and pushed myself to the limit. I made mistakes and learned lessons. I was able to simultaneously be a teacher and a student. I felt pressure of stress, technical difficulties, disgruntled cast members, learning my lines and my music while creating the steps for every musical number in the show. I painted the 'show-board' and the set with as much attention to detail as I would have paid to singing the right notes. We planted live plants in the front of the set which we moved out side to live and grow during the day. We gave nothing up to frustration or apathy, every problem was faced, tackled and solved.

As a singer, an actress, a visual artist, a choreographer and a dancer I felt my wings open and my talent fly with this show. I learned that in the shadow of challenge I can rise to the occasion with intelligence, ability and ferocity. I found my way even in the shadow of adversity and I'm proud to say that I will walk away with the little piece of paper that won't guarantee me a job, because I guarantee myself a job and long career to follow.

SUMMARY OF DANCE STUDIES

FUNDAMENTALS OF DANCE COMPOSITION I

In this introduction to collegiate dance study, Judy provided a stimulating and safe environment for learning. We improvised, composed dance studies, reflected upon and assessed our own work and the work of peers and professionals in the dance world. We learned how to speak, read and write with intelligence about dance and dancing, how to function as an integral part of a dance community, and how to integrate lessons for the course with other experiences in our lives. The concentration of our study was on six essential areas of dance: the *Creative Process*: research, incubation, presentation etc., *Aesthetic Principles*: space, time and energy (force), intention, development, transitions, kinesthesia, kinetic mimicry, making metaphor, and gesture etc. And we worked with the four stages of being which characterize our work—Awareness, Attention, Intention and Action-Execution. *Physical and Performance Skills*: ‘dance’ movements as well as ‘pedestrian’ movements and at times ‘codified’ movements. *Aesthetic Valuing*: reflection and assessment dimensions of our work. *Cultural-Historical Context*: how our life and living is affected by and reflected in our culture and history. *Integration*: linking ideas to other courses, outside life etc. We worked in groups and partners to complete several studies of dance making such as the sculpture study, the machine study, and the momentum study.

FUNDAMENTALS OF DANCE COMPOSITION II

The second installment of the composition course was really just an extension of the first,, getting deeper into ideas and concepts, really developing our understanding and application of the ‘fundamentals’ we’d learned in the first semester. We all developed a wide dance vocabulary as well as the ability to use it when speaking clearly about a study we’ve observed. We brought life to dance with inspiration from poetry, music, and simple descriptive words that fueled an entire study. The most memorable part of the class was the compilation of our ‘qualities of dance’ portfolio. I personally chose to focus on ‘time, space and energy (force). I cut out pictures, and took famous quotes from dancers and non-dancers alike to make a piece of art that chronicled my freshman year in the LMU dance department. We also watched and analyzed professional dance videos, kept a journal., and wrote formal reflections, and answered many questions such as; ‘What are five important concepts that I learned in Fundamentals of Dance Composition I and II?’ ‘What have I learned about myself as a dancer?’ and ‘What learning have I seen in my fellow students?’.

DANCE STYLES AND FORMS

In this course we learned how to recognize and develop multiple approaches to dance composition, to really delve deeper into Laban's Effort Concepts (being able to not only fully understand them, but also apply them), to gain understanding of music (or the lack thereof) and dance related to dance composition and most importantly to develop our own personal dance aesthetic. We reviewed and looked deeper into the concepts of Awareness, Attention, Intention and Physicalization/Action, and different compositional issues/devices—all of which were solidified with a short study (solo and group). Several articles about dance were read and evaluated, and a final paper (with accompanying oral presentation) completed our semester of study.

LABAN MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

The teaching and application of the theories of Rudolf Laban were covered in this class, the most obvious being Space, Time and Energy (weight and flow). The detailed movement qualities of Energy such as the *passive/indulging actions*: dab, glide, flick and float, and the *active/fighting actions*: press, punch, slash and wring, and the qualities of *weight*: from light to strong or firm and of *flow*: from free to bound. The detailed movement qualities of Space such as *paths*: direct and indirect, *levels*: low, mid-range and high (aerial), *directions*: forward, backward and sideways, *facings*: upstage, downstage, stage right/center/left, and *personal space*: kinespheres (near/far), symmetry/asymmetry, positive/negative. The detailed movement qualities of Time such as *duration*: length of time to perform an action, *tempo*: rate of speed (slow, moderate or fast), *meter*: basic grouping of beats (regular; consistent/not variable and irregular: inconsistent/variable), and *stillness*: non movement, pause (breath/suspension of time) or stop (complete resolution, termination of movement). Notation of all of the above was also taught and tested. Studies of all of the above put the concepts into our bodies (those that were particularly effective were done outside, away from our 'natural' dance setting).

MUSIC FOR DANCE AND DRUMMING

In the *music for dance* course we covered the basic principles and terminology of music to further educate ourselves in our art. The ability to communicate accurately and efficiently with musicians is an indispensable tool should any of us go on to be teachers or choreographers. We spent the class time going over each term individually to ensure that complete understanding and the ability to use each term or phrase was apparent. We were given a test in the phrases twice over the course of the semester to really embed the information into our minds as opposed to cramming a load of useless knowledge before the exams and forgetting it the next day. This method allowed us to focus solely on the essential principals at hand and to grasp them with confidence. The *drumming* section of the course gave us the opportunity for hands on appreciation of the work musicians do, in particular the unique art of playing music specifically for dance. Several different songs were learned rehearsed and performed along with brief lessons about the cultures from

which they came. We learned from observation and were eventually able to identify and play multiple parts of a given song when called upon to do so.

TO DANCE IS HUMAN: DANCE, CULTURE AND SOCIETY

This class truly altered the human perspective of culture, life and movement of everyone involved, not just the dancers. We were challenged with simple yet extraordinarily difficult questions like "What is culture?", "What is a person?", "What is dance?", "Why do people dance?" and "What does it mean to be human?". All of the wonderful teachers who shared their culture with us also left us with a little part of each of their souls. We learned through numerous handouts containing invaluable nuggets of information, videos of far removed cultures that we may not have otherwise been able to experience, through movement—actually participating in the process of making dance which has deep cultural and historical ties to our species and through the writing and sharing of our own unique experiences as Americans, students, dancers, sisters, orphans and humans. This was less of a class and more of a life experience. The culmination of which was a massive paper/story of our own experience with dance, culture and society and the sharing of our basket with the class.

DANCE HISTORY

A healthy knowledge of the history of your art is indispensable, and this class accomplished just such a goal for the dancers at LMU. We learned to appreciate the work done by the founders of many genres of dance, groundbreaking choreographers, performers and critics. We learned the art of analyzing dance from a critical perspective and completed such critiques periodically throughout the semester on major works of dance literature or choreography. Like to dance is human, this course also touched on the essence of dance being a reflection of culture, and the process of change that defines 'history'. With an understanding of dance history we can give meaning, appreciation to the art that we've chosen to be our life's work. Tests were reflective of the meat and potatoes dates and names, and everyday class work ranged from discussion, videos, demonstrations and even some studio movement exploration. We concluded the semester by becoming a famous figure from the history of dance for a five minute first person presentation of the life, work, influence and significance of our character's career.

KINESIOLOGY I

This class teaches the dancer to truly study the physiology (function) of the human body and how to define the different systems of the body, how they work together and relate to one another. The major systems covered are the respiratory system, the energy systems, cells and tissues, the skeletal system (bones and bone tissue), the muscular system, the heart and circulatory systems, and the nervous system. Detailed working knowledge of each of these systems helps a dancer to maintain optimal health, thus enhancing performance efficiency and quality and reducing injury potential. We all were

able to gain tools for understanding, maintaining, fine tuning and protecting our instrument.

KINESIOLOGY II

This section of Kinesiology was far more hands on and more in depth than the first. We worked from the basics of how the breath affects the body and identifying landmarks which can tell you volumes of information about any person's (not just a dancer's) habits and tendencies, to the detailed workings of every local and global muscle in the body. We also studied Movement therapy, to use for ourselves in our careers as dancers, as well as practical information for helping others should we pursue dance science. Pilates exercises such as the pelvic clock and other essential core strengthening exercises were worked on during the lab portion of the class. The major subjects covered in the tests were the respiratory system, the foot and ankle, the knee, the hip and pelvis, the spine (vertebrae), and the various major muscle systems of the body.

CREATIVE DANCE FOR CHILDREN

In this class we all became familiar with the physical and emotional developmental patterns of children (preschool through 12 yrs.) and how to create dance/movement sequences to promote learning. We were able, at the end of a course, to design, write and follow through with a lesson plan, which accurately followed the components of the California State Framework and Standards for the Visual and Performing Arts in the area of dance. Our lesson plans had clear student outcomes, sequence of ideas, development of parts to a meaningful culminating task and assessment questions. We were also asked to demonstrate an increased awareness of dance as an art form, and a means of self expression as well as a wonderful tool for stressing kinesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence in designing lessons for children. A class of actual children came in for our observation and interaction and gave hands on experience which cannot be learned from a book.

BALLET

For all but one of my semesters at LMU, I've been in the advanced Ballet class. We learn to execute advanced technique, for example, developing the use of port de bras in coordination with the legs, musicality, phrasing, timing as well as increasing our stamina and strength. We learn how to absorb and perform combinations quickly and with accuracy, demonstrating our knowledge of ballet vocabulary, and our mental capacity to execute combinations without aid of demonstration. As with all dance classes, in ballet we learn to not only execute the steps correctly, but to put our own artistry into the combinations and develop a strong, unique voice in our technique.

MODERN

The lower levels of modern dance at LMU focus on the 'classical modern' techniques like Graham and Horton for example. Strong core motivated movement (use of contraction etc.) and very specific isolation and 'flatback' work dominated the class work. In the higher levels of class, the emphasis shifts to the much more athletic and contemporary technique of Stephanie Gilliland. In Holly's class we learn to build a strong foundation of strength and a range of articulation in our bodies working towards the physicalization of concepts such as momentum, force, torque, spiral, suspension, attack and gravity. The class further develops traditional modern technique, Ashtanga based yoga and Pilates. A strong emphasis lies in the physical awareness inside and outside of our bodies, to make intelligent discoveries, decisions and breakthroughs everyday in class. We learn to look at our dancing from both a functional (anatomical) and aesthetic (artistic) perspectives. On top of a continued exploration of time, space and energy, we also work on the integration of breath into all of our dancing. Professional standards and qualities are expected of us as we move closer to graduation and the highly competitive dance world.

JAZZ

The first Jazz class that I took my freshman year was with Reggie Brown. In that course we worked in a very classical technique working mostly on abdominal core strength. The more lyrical style was taught in the basic class format of warm up, across the floor and variation. The next Jazz class I took was with Jason Myher and was definitely commercial jazz. Unlike Reggie's class where he actually taught technique, Jason led us through a set warm up and variation with no real teaching involved. This was beneficially in training for the world of auditions, because that is very much what the content of the course reminded me of. The final was different in that we were given a short combination and then everyone received a word which they had to emulate with their dancing of the phrase. Advanced Commercial Jazz with Paige Porter was far more educational from a technical point of view, as well as an excellent education on the 'ins and outs' of the professional world of commercial dance. We worked everyday on a set warm-up and across the floors with the addition of phrase work throughout the semester. Our midterm and final consisted of an audition format class period performing a phrase rehearsed in class, as well as an individual video taping of each dancer.

WORLD DANCE

I took "Dance of Bali" for my world dance requirement. We learned the very basic movements and choreography of Balinese dance, as well as some of the cultural traditions which inspire the performance of such work. We were lucky enough to get to study a bit of Balinese music as well because of the world music class's participation with us in a brief performance at the end of the semester. It is a very technical style of dance which requires that every muscle be active at all times, from your finger tips to your eyes!

A deep angular plie provides the base of all the other movements and the arms are in a constant state of flexion—all of which was a total shock to our western training as dancers. The course taught us all how to work with the foreign movements and translate some of the beautiful gestures into our own work.

TAP

Steve Zee taught a wonderful class on the basics of tap dancing as well as the traditional steps that tapers everywhere should know. We learned very simple time steps and phrases, all the way through to an intermediate combination for our final. We worked through the same warm up everyday to really polish up our flaps, shuffles and heels and then learned different short combinations that worked the steps really into our bodies. Music knowledge and application was also important and reflected in written exams (ex. different ways to count a musical phrase or how many beats are in a measure for example.).

YOGA

This class was an instructor led practice of Ashtanga Yoga, which challenges the body in the aspects of strength and stamina. Unlike the more passive and meditative forms of yoga, this style is contoured perfectly for a dancer who can translate their understanding of movement and the body into a much deeper practice and core strengthening. We learned the basic postures of the first session and progressively added more challenging postures to the routine. Each class began with harmonizing 'sun salutations' and ended with the unifying 'ohm' said by the whole class. Everyone engaged in a constant dialog of inquiry and exploration with each other as well as with Holly. A journal of our personal journey and struggle was kept to address the questions that sometimes only come out when you look back at your practice in reflection.

PRIOAV DANCE WORKSHOP

This course is an extension of the advanced modern class, with mostly the same objectives, more time is spent however on working through individual movements such as inversions or leg swings with detail and dialog about the process in our bodies. Improvisation, conditioning, partnering and phrase work are all encompassed in this class, which can also focus on the restorative movements dancers need to know when treating injuries or maintaining optimum health during a rigorous performance schedule.